

In this history, the mine was reported to be "one of the best equipped and regulated operations in the country." It was noted that the mine had been worked nearly 50 years without any explosions and boasted that the mine had one of Pennsylvania's best safety records.

Another article focused on a previous incident wherein a group of "foreigners" violated the rules regarding open flames in coal mines. The report noted that the men were prosecuted before the alderman and given a warning.

Another announced the closing of the mills if the mine were not reopened quickly. The Rolling Mill Mine had an output of 3,000 tons of coal per day and supplied the Cambria Mills with most of its coal.

By Monday, July 14, 111 of the dead were found. It was reported that four more bodies had been found in the mine on Saturday evening, and that two miners had died at the Cambria Hospital.

An inspection over the weekend showed the gas content to be normal. The most extensive structural damage was to the doors which had been blown off their hinges by the force of the explosion. These were repaired for between 30 and 35 dollars.

The mine reopened with a crew of 75 on Monday morning, just four days after the disaster. It remained open until the 1930s.



courtesy of the Johnstown Flood Museum

## Ghosts at The Incline? Perhaps spirits from the 1902 mine explosion.



courtesy of the Johnstown Flood Museum

Early in the fall of 1992, Johnstown Tribune-Democrat reporter Art Heinz reported that a 10-year-old boy informed Incline Plane officials that he had seen two miners with their lunch buckets standing at the base of the incline. The boy couldn't have known that 112 miners lost their lives on this hillside on July 10, 1902. It is doubtful that he even knew there'd been a mine here, and that hundreds of miners dug coal from this hillside for almost three-quarters of a century.

Besides, Richard Burkert, director of the Johnstown Area Heritage Center, says that Johnstown really doesn't have any ghostly legends. "It's a little strange," he says, "considering all the disaster the city has seen."

The following is an account of what happened here on this hillside at 11:20 a.m., July 10, 1902. Take a walk along the James Wolfe Sculpture Trail. As you ride the incline to and /or from your destination, pause a moment and listen to that spirit.

The first report of trouble came about noon when a group of miners who were at work in what was known as the Klondike area of the Cambria Steel Company's Rolling Mill Mine, stumbled out of the mine. They spoke of feeling an explosion and of signs of the presence of afterdamp, a fatal gas with no taste, color or odor.

James E. Roderick of Hazelton, Chief of the Bureau of Mines of the Department of Internal Affairs arrived to take charge of the investigation. Josiah T. Evans, a Johnstown-based mine inspector was also called to help.

Evans spoke to the Tribune noting that Klondike was known as a gaseous mine, particularly between rooms 15 and 20. He explained that a gas which is lighter than air called firedamp raises to the high parts of the

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The entrance to the Rolling Mill Mine is marked along

the James Wolfe Sculpture Trail

accessible from the ticket booth at the bottom of the Inclined Plane

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Published by the Cambria County Transit Authority of Johnstown, PA.

Written, edited and designed by Bem Enterprises, Inc. Illustrations by S.L. Wanchisn.

Resources: *The Johnstown Tribune* (July 10 - July 21, 1902); *The Pittsburgh Dispatch* (July 10 - July 16, 1902); *The Johnstown Democrat* (July 12, 1902); and *Report of the Bureau of Mines*, no. 13 (1902) pp. 612-616,

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rooms when the pillars are drawn. When a fall occurs, the gas is driven down with great force and sometimes causes an explosion. He said that he thought if the velocity of the gas current was much over 12 feet a second, it might have caused the ignition of the gas.

Asked what he thought might have caused the explosion, Evans replied that any comments he made "were merely conjectures" and that the truth would probably never be known. But, he speculated that it was "caused by the violation of some rule - possibly by someone lighting a match in the danger zone, or by a miner opening his safety lamp."

It was 4 p.m. when a formal rescue team was assembled. The rescue team included several physicians who carried oxygen tanks, and hypodermic doses of nitro-glycerine, strychnia, digitalis, and aromatic spirits of ammonia and other powerful heart stimulants.

About one-fourth mile into Klondike, the group found dead mules. Shortly thereafter they found the first of dead miners "lying on the railroad track faces down, twenty-five bodies being counted in about a furlough."

William Robinson and a man only identified as Valentine and 20 other miners were found alive in a passage on the outer side of a trap door. All were treated with oxygen and heart stimulants before they were put on a cart to be transported out of the mine. All were brought above ground by 11 p.m. and taken to Memorial Hospital.

The first concern was for the living. The bodies of the dead were laid along the track and the rescue squads moved onward to look for survivors.

By the time the Tribune went to press on Friday, 84 bodies had been taken out of the mine and it was

feared that the dead would number over a hundred. Those deceased had been removed and taken to the Armory, and their names listed in the newspapers.

Relief drives were instituted by the Tribune and by the banks and neighboring communities. By the day following the explosion, contributions were collected from Windber, and from U.S. National Bank, and The First National Bank.

The Cambria Mutual Benefit Association announced that each of the families of the deceased would receive \$1,000. All Cambria workers

were required to belong to the Association.

When the body of Bronisia Wenesfsky was found, he had \$765.40 in his wallet. As the Tribune reported it, "The money was wrapped neatly in paper, the gold separated from the currency, and upon the wrapping were written in the Polish language, what persons conversant with the tongue, pronounced to be Polish sentimental verse and quotations."

Father Dembinski told the Tribune about a young man who had

worked in the Rolling Mill Mine for only one day. The miner had worked in the Arnot Mines in Tioga County and wrote to the Polish priest asking if there might be any jobs for him in Johnstown. Upon inquiry, it was discovered there were, and so he came.

"He came here last week," Father Dembinski said, "and yesterday went to work in the mine in which he has probably met his death. This was his second day in the mine and I'm afraid it is his last. He leaves a wife and a child. His goods are still at the P.R.R. freight depot on Railroad Street."

Although the actual investigation of the deaths would not be until July 23, a jury was summoned immediately so that they could view the bodies of the dead.

By Saturday afternoon, the headlines announced that 105 miners had died in the disaster. Sunday was the day for funerals, and funeral corteges marched along Broad Street, all day. There were 95 funerals in Cambria City and 52 at St. Casimir's Polish church.

The bodies of the miners were laid out in the parlors of their homes, and

the priests and altar boys went from house to house to perform a brief service. Fifteen tenants of the same boarding house on McConaughy Street were killed in the explosion.

Because of the many reporters who came to Johnstown, every detail of the explosion was described. Two of the most popular stories were about the miner who came back from the dead and about 15 year old Lawrence Rhoads.

As the story went liveryman James Rugh was driving a load of corpses from the mine to the Armory when one of the corpses moved. Rugh investigated and found that the man was alive. Rugh fanned the man to give him more air and to revive him, then rushed him to the hospital.

In another story, 15-year-old Lawrence Rhoads, who resided with his mother at 160 Gautier Street, escaped the mine alive. As he exited the shaft he saw the timekeeper at the Gautier Department.

"Oh Mr.," the boy said. "I don't want to lose any time of account of this. Can you give me a job at Gautier?"

"Come around in the morning," was the reply, and promptly at 7 o'clock the next morning Lawrence Rhoads started to work in one of the shops in the Gautier Department.

There were also stories of other mine disasters. According to The Tribune, the January 17, 1891 disaster at Mammoth Mine located between Greensburg and Scottsdale took 102 lives and was often cited as western Pennsylvania's worst mine disaster. In just one day, Johnstown would hold that unenviable position.

Through it all, the Tribune published a continuous stream of literature that showed the Carnegie Steel Company to be a responsible and safe employer.



BRINGING THE FIRST LOAD OF 45 DEAD OUT AT THE JOHNSTOWN ENTRANCE

This Scene, Drawn by a Dispatch Artist, Took Place at Hawk's Brick Yard at 5:40 O'Clock Friday Morning.